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## Reviews, Critiques, and Annotations

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## REVIEWS, CRITIQUES, AND ANNOTATIONS

*A Guide to Pre-Federal Records in the National Archives.* Compiled by Howard H. Wehmann; revised by Benjamin L. DeWhitt. Washington: National Archives and Records Administration, 1989. Pp. xiii, 375; appendixes, bibliography, index; ISBN 0-911333-75-4; \$25 (hardcover only).

The cliché "everything but the kitchen sink" is apt for this book, the culmination of more than three decades' work by the staff of the National Archives. A description of all their holdings created before the implementation of the United States Constitution in 1789, this guide also includes later records containing substantive information about the pre-Federal period and is not limited to the geographic area that would come to constitute the new nation. Authored by veteran archivists who know the records, *A Guide to Pre-Federal Records in the National Archives* is thorough and intelligently helpful. The capstone to an edifice of finding aids to these records and an essential tool for scholars, the volume nonetheless has problems, some of which are implied by the cliché with which this review began.

The National Archives microfilmed the most important of these records, the Papers of the Continental Congress, in 1959. Twenty years later they issued the massive five-volume *Index to the Papers of the Continental Congress*, a computer-assisted item-level index and calendar. Earlier indexes had been prepared when those records were in custody of the State Department and (after 1903) the Library of Congress. Between 1904 and 1937, the library issued the standard thirty-four-volume printed edition of the *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, for which the National Archives published a consolidated index in 1976. The War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records and the Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files have also been thoroughly microfilmed and described. Two decades ago the compiler of this new guide, Howard Wehmann, revised Mabel Deutrich's 1962 *Preliminary Inventory of the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records* and wrote the pamphlets describing three microfilm publications from that record group. In all, ninety-one microfilm publications have been issued depicting records described in this volume.

The coverage in *A Guide to Pre-Federal Records* extends far beyond the best-known records that scholars and genealogists have long heavily used, leaving the impression that many nooks and crannies have been searched for possibly relevant items. Records from approximately fifty record groups are included. In a microfilm publication pamphlet issued as long as a dozen years ago, Wehmann was reported to be at work on this "comprehensive guide." The guide contains no description of how it was compiled, but the results lend confidence that it is indeed "comprehensive," in some cases excessively so. The record descriptions are generally at the volume, subseries, or series level, but this does not preclude inclusion of stray items like a handful of copies of Revolutionary War letters in Captain David

Hopkins's file in the letters received, 1812-94, of the War Department's Ordnance Department. When this degree of thoroughness leads to careful descriptions of stray interrelated pre-Federal fiscal volumes in widely separate places, it is much to be admired. On the other hand, when this painstaking inclusiveness causes record groups to appear in particular chapters only because they contain one facsimile of a 1771 map or two 1923 watercolors depicting a Revolutionary artilleryman, it raises doubts as to the level of judgment exercised in the effort.

After two chapters, "General Records of the Pre-Federal Period and the Continental Congress" and "Records of the Constitutional Convention," ten chapters cover "Commercial Affairs," "Fiscal Affairs," "Foreign Affairs," "Indians and Indian Affairs," "Judicial Affairs," "Land and Exploration," "Military Affairs," "Naval Affairs," "Pensions, Bounty-Land Grants, and Other Claims," and "Postal Affairs." Entries within the chapters are arranged by record group in numerical order. An exception is made for Record Group 360, the Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, which in each chapter immediately follows the introductory paragraphs and helps to provide the context for the rest of the records. Extensive cross-references use a numbering scheme that combines a two-letter abbreviation for the chapter subject, the record group number, and sequential paragraph numbers. This cumbersome scheme is clearly explained in the introduction, which further enhances its status with the dubious instruction that these numbers should be "cited by researchers when requesting records." These numbers are also used for the references in the index.

Consistent implementation of this guide's procedures leads to six separate and partially repetitive entries each for the Records of the Spanish Governors of Puerto Rico and the Records of the Government of the Virgin Islands [Danish West Indies]. These



entries fall within the definition of the volume's scope, but are essentially unrelated to the other records. A less mechanical and more sensible solution might have been a discussion in the front matter. In a few cases omissions rather than inclusions are also a problem. No mention is made of the National Genealogical Society's published *Index of Revolutionary War Pension Applications in the National Archives*, and the editions of the papers of Robert Morris, Nathanael Greene, and Henry Laurens ought to have been cited even if other "papers of" projects less directly derived from the described records had to be omitted. Careful notation of the location of originals in the description of photostatic or transcribed copies (or the disclaimer that they are not known) falters with a letterbook of John Paul Jones and a number of logs and diaries in the Naval Records Collection of the Office of Naval Records and Library.

Because this volume's scope is defined by chronology rather than provenance and its coverage is thorough almost to a fault, it is a potpourri that ranges from the Declaration of Independence and the colonial vice-admiralty court records of New York and South Carolina to a receipt "for reducing one pound steel to dust for making Fireworks to commemorate the anniversary of Independence" in 1781 and a 1955 report on a search for pathological materials removed from the body of John Paul Jones. This reviewer, one of the few persons who will ever read the volume from beginning to end, can testify that a high standard for description prevails throughout. It is unfortunate that this important finding aid is encumbered with an awkward structure and the results of some dubious judgments as to what merited inclusion between its covers.

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*Guide and Resources for Archival Strategic Preservation Planning* (GRASP). Bonnie Rose Curtin, project director. Albany, N. Y.: National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, 1991.

The concept of providing a tool for strategic preservation planning by archival, manuscript, and special collections repositories is the ambitious and worthy goal of *Guide and Resources for Archival Strategic Preservation Planning* (GRASP), produced by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) with support from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). Although a daunting tome of some nine hundred numbered pages and a computer disk, this publication makes available for the first time in one place, in a convenient loose-leaf format, an impressive array of useful information and provides a framework for studying and evaluating short- and long-term preservation needs. For so ambitious a project, it is perhaps inevitable that the final product is not without flaws. GRASP remains an important step toward bringing together the micromanagement of preservation functions into a broad program of coordinated long-range evaluation and planning.

The project administrators and director rightly point to the need for a preservation tool directed toward archival repositories, with a planning mechanism as a central element. The field of preservation publishing has focused heavily on library standards, microfilming and reformatting for book collections, and conservation of specialized media. There has been a void in published literature devoted to strategic program planning for archives, bringing together a broad management perspective and

information from a wide spectrum of the field. The excellent SAA manual by Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, which is soon to be published in an updated and revised edition, serves as an introduction to preservation and conservation issues for practicing and beginning professionals. GRASP focuses on institutional preservation planning, following the format of the planning tool produced for libraries by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

GRASP is first and foremost a management tool, formulated because of a demonstrated need in government archives. The authors have intended, however, that its use be broadly applicable to all repositories, large and small, housing archival materials. Their goal for broad applicability has been largely achieved. Divided into three sections (or tools), GRASP provides a manual which outlines preservation planning goals under fourteen archival functions and suggests the benefits and questions that must be addressed (166 pages); a computer-assisted interactive self-study on two 5 1/2" diskettes or one 3 1/4" diskette that will run on an IBM-compatible personal computer (with at least 350K memory); and a 645-page "resource compendium" that includes not only a bibliography of major published sources in seven areas relating to preservation issues, but reproduces many of the most important ones in full or in major part.

The manual, with its detailed outlines of goals and objectives and concomitant decision factors relating to actors, mechanisms, benefits, finances, and review procedures is a key element of the publication, but the two sections that immediately attract attention for their obvious practical application and usefulness are the computer-assisted self-study and the "resource compendium." Any repository will find the compendium a gold mine of information. Here one finds copies of articles from a wide range of publications, from *College and Research Libraries News* to *Conservation Administration News*, as well as a wealth



of unpublished documents. Included are sample preservation surveys and self-studies from archival institutions; ANSI and other technical standards; technical information papers and staff information papers from the National Archives; lists of organizations and institutions involved in preservation of documentary resources with a description of their activities, publications, addresses, and telephone numbers; names and addresses of vendors for specific preservation supplies and services; a list of products tested by the National Archives; and information on contracting microfilm services and on applying for grants. The resource compendium brings together in one easy-to-use collection those documents and directories that few of us ever seem to have in complete form in one place, easily retrievable. Preservation administrators in libraries would likely not have many of the sources that pertain primarily to archives. The readings are divided into sections on resources, administration, security and disaster, physical plan and environment, record materials, and reprography.

The computer-assisted preservation survey includes some three hundred questions on diskette, relating to aspects of a repository's operations from surveying to accessioning to housing and access. More "interactive" than a paper questionnaire, the computer software program entices involvement in preservation planning (the "entertainment" factor) and makes the analysis of information a transparent process. The computer does it for you! For larger institutions, in which several staff in specialized areas may need to be involved in responses to the computer-prompted questions, an inflexibility in the software program may present difficulties. One cannot skip a question and go back to it later, without beginning the entire program over again. There are several minor problems (unclear wording of one or two questions, typos, and spelling errors) that a closer editing would have corrected. And there are some curious omissions or emphases.



A question on fumigation of materials is not followed by a question about the methods of fumigation, now a major issue. References to machine-readable records occur in several sequences, yet there is no special emphasis to indicate the increasing importance of the preservation problem they present to large modern archival institutions.

The report that is generated at the end of the interactive session, which will vary in time required depending on the complexity of the institution, seems not as significant as the process of going through the intellectual exercise (since additional staff and resources are hardly revelations), but will be useful for providing solid information to administrators who oversee budgets and resource allocation. The computer-assisted survey, despite the inevitable problems with a new product, is an imaginative and valuable vehicle for stimulating more precise and information-based planning.

More than a set of practical tools for assessing and administering a strategic preservation plan, GRASP is also an educational vehicle. It must be used critically and with intelligent selectivity, but it is an important innovation, and a challenging one, forcing archival administrators to approach preservation in a thorough programmatic way, in order to move our institutions beyond the patchwork approach to preservation. It is hoped that the publication will stir comment and critique and that a revised edition will be forthcoming to take advantage of user criticisms and reactions. GRASP is a publication that every archival administrator will want to examine and utilize.

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*Meeting the Preservation Challenge*. Edited by Jan Merrill-Oldham. Washington, DC: Association of Research Libraries, 1988. Pp. 70; ISBN 0-918996-15-5; \$25 paper (\$14 ARL members).

Preservation issues were the focus of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) meeting in October of 1987, when leaders in the library preservation field convened to explore how research libraries could meet the needs of deteriorating and endangered collections. Speakers offered perspectives on the design and management of preservation programs along with strategies to help librarians better respond to "the preservation challenge."

Papers from this session originally appeared in *Preservation: A Research Library Priority for the 1990s: Minutes of the 111 Membership Meeting of the Association of Research Libraries*. Then in 1988, ARL published the conference papers separately in *Meeting the Preservation Challenge*, edited by conference participant Jan Merrill-Oldham. The papers are preceded by the editor's foreword and are divided into four sections: an introduction, "Preservation Program Development in the Research Library," "Special Perspectives," and a conclusion.

Given the passage of time since these papers were first delivered, general readers may ask whether these talks offer any new initiatives for addressing preservation problems. Archivists examining these papers should evaluate the suggested approaches and determine whether or not they are applicable to archival as well as library settings.

Readers will likely find "Preservation Program Development in the Research Library" the most substantive section. William J. Studer, director of libraries at Ohio State, makes a number of important points in "The Role of the Library Director: Wherefor and Wherewithal." Administrators are urged to be as interested

in the physical state of collections as in collection size. Studer believes leadership must come from the highest levels of the institution's organization and encourages administrators to commit internal financial resources for preservation. He also cautions his audience against overreliance on new technologies as a solution to preservation problems. Studer's perspective suggestion of allocating acquisition funds to support preservation efforts will please many archivists and records managers who advocate similar approaches. He echoes the sentiments of many in the preservation field when he states, "Ultimately, preservation is everyone's concern."

In his enthusiasm to promote interest in preservation and rally the library community, Studer regrettably underrepresents the achievements archivists and other nonlibrary personnel have had in the preservation arena: "Unfortunately, the crisis that threatens our documentary heritage is still largely unrecognized outside the library field."

While there are some similarities between libraries and archives, fundamental differences in their organizational and managerial structures often hamper the application of library preservation program components to archival settings. Because many of the features of Jan Merrill-Oldham's "The Preservation Program Defined" are specific to a research library preservation program, with its focus on circulating collections, this discussion is of limited usefulness to the archivist. Merrill-Oldham does, however, stress the need for integrating preservation activities with other repository functions, important for the success of library and archives preservation programs.

Problems of adapting the library program to the archival setting are also inherent in Carolyn Clark Morrow's "Staffing the Preservation Program." While librarians have been more inclined to bring an individual with preservation knowledge into the institution, archivists have looked from within to identify



archival administrators prepared to champion the preservation cause. Choosing preservation personnel from within flows naturally from preservation's intrinsic place in the archival mission.

In considering ways to structure reporting lines, Morrow suggests that the preservation administrator may report to the director, assistant director for collection development, or head of technical services. Successful instances of archival preservation personnel reporting to administrators for reference or public service can also be cited.

Archivists will discover Wes Boomgaarden's "Prospective Preservation" well written and informative. Boomgaarden's concepts transfer well from library to archival setting. He provides practical information about the interplay of factors affecting the longevity of holdings and stresses the importance of staff and user education.

Boomgaarden outlines preventive measures that can ultimately preclude the need for expensive remedies. Archivists must embrace this significant point if they are to care successfully for the massive numbers of items entrusted to them. Because preservation statistics have traditionally focused on numbers of items treated, institutional commitment to preservation has often been measured by money spent on staff and equipment to perform remedial treatment activities. Coordinated programs, like holdings maintenance in archives, look to shift the yardstick for preservation from remedial to preventive activities. Through efforts of this kind, our progress in meeting the preservation challenge may one day be measured not by the number of items treated but by the number of items that never need to be treated.

In a readable and provocative talk, "Preservation Selection and Treatment Options," Barclay Ogden explodes a number of assumptions about the "brittle book problem" and recommends a strategy for preservation selection. Implicating use as well as



deterioration as contributing factors to collection condition, Ogden advocates a selection strategy based both on condition and use. Although his discussion is based on the book format, Ogden's philosophy deftly translates to archival preservation selection practices and is worthwhile reading for the librarian and archivist alike.

In the final paper in this section, "Preservation Planning and Perspective," Gay Walker fosters the planning process. Archivists will find the section on what it is that should be planned much more relevant than the preceding section, "What Planning Tools Are Available?" In her discussion of planning tools, Walker devotes considerable attention to ARL's self-study. The possibility that staff become "specialists" as a result of conducting the study pinpoints a major flaw in the attributes of the tool. The study is only as useful as the way it is used; if users do not fully understand the purpose of the survey or how it should be carried out, the statistical validity of the survey must be questioned. The study itself requires a significant commitment of human resources and is often regarded by library administrators as a "final product" rather than the first step in a preservation program. Archivists would be better directed toward examining the recent *Guide and Resources for Archival Strategic Preservation Planning* (GRASP) developed by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators (NAGARA) as a planning tool for archival repositories. (GRASP is available from the Society of American Archivists.) [See previous review.]

Walker provides a good summary of the planning process and what can be gained from it. She reminds her audience that relying on regional, cooperative, or another's planning is not proper institutional planning. Preservation planning cannot be regarded as a special project but must be "ongoing and evolving." Stressing the importance of knowing where you are as well where

you are going, Walker writes, "The success of a preservation program and the rate at which it is implemented are often directly proportionate to the amount of effective planning that precedes action. Once established, program components should be reviewed regularly so that problems can be identified, successful activities expanded, and new components added."

While several of the conference participants highlight important aspects of preservation, readers must generally wade through large portions of the publication before arriving at enlightening sections. Archivists accustomed to scanning library literature for information adaptable to archives will still encounter difficulties, mainly because these papers have not undergone a much-needed transformation from oral presentation to written text. Analogies used to engage the audience or relax the speaker can appear out of place on the printed page. Nuances conveyed through a speaker's delivery or intonation are lost, and statements may be interpreted more harshly than otherwise intended.

A number of editorial oversights impede a smooth reading of text:

In the foreword, a verb is missing in the opening sentence of the second paragraph.

Patricia Battin is the president of the Commission **on** (not **of**) Preservation and Access. (Foreword)

Page 4 repeats the last line of page 3.

Page 18 has "lactivities" instead of "activities".

Morrow footnotes Studer's paper but not Merrill-Oldham's (page 26).

On page 36, the first sentence of the second paragraph is lacking a verb.

On page 37, Wei T'o nonaqueous book "acidification" system should read "**deacidification**."

On page 56, a word is missing in the first sentence of paragraph 4.

While the text itself was printed on paper meeting the minimum requirements of ANSI Z39.48-1984, the 8 1/2 x 11—inch soft binding is held together by only a hot-melt adhesive, certain to create its own "preservation challenge."

*Meeting the Preservation Challenge* allows the reader a glimpse at those preservation issues considered most critical to the research library community in the late 1980s. While archivists may not wish to embrace all philosophies or emulate all suggested practices, examining library preservation models can be a useful exercise and review for assessing archival preservation priorities.

Hilary A. Kaplan

Conservator

Georgia Department of Archives and History

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The *SAA Newsletter Index*, compiled by Laura Saegert, indexes subject matter from the newsletter's beginning in 1974 through 1988. The spiral-bound paperback has cross references and up to four levels of subentries. Despite some inconsistencies in categories and indentation, the comprehensive index should be an aid to the study of the organization and U. S. archival activity since 1974. It is 58 pages long plus cover and measures 8 1/2 by 11 inches, a handy size to file with the newsletters and other SAA publications. Order from SAA (312-922-0140); \$10 members, \$14 nonmembers; subject to shipping and handling charges.

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The National Governors' Association (NGA) has issued a publication, *Executive Chamber Records: A Guide for Governors*, by Dorothy Dale Pollack, records management analyst with the North Carolina Division of Archives and History. NAGARA developed the publication for the NGA. In 52 pages it emphasizes the importance of governors' records, provides a summary of records management principles, and discusses in detail records retention and disposition schedules, filing systems, nontextual records, and management of archival records. It is available for \$10 from the NGA Publications Office, 444 N. Capitol St., Washington, DC 20001-1572 (202-624-5300).

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*Permanent Paper: The Alkaline Advantage*, a two-page informational handout printed on alkaline paper, is available free from the Georgia Department of Archives and History, 330 Capitol Ave., SE, Atlanta, GA 30334.

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*Archives and You: The Benefits of Historical Records* is a twelve-page booklet directed to a general audience to help explain the fundamentals of historical records. A free copy may be obtained from Terry Sewell, New York State Archives and Records Administration, 10A46 Cultural Education Center, Albany, NY 12230.

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*A New Age: Electronic Information Systems, State Governments, and the Preservation of the Archival Record* offers principles to guide the management of government records and



help shape government-wide information policy coordination. Published by the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators, the brochure deals with the fundamental impact of electronic information systems on traditional recordkeeping practices. Free single copies are available from Gaye Horton, Council of State Governments, P.O. Box 11910, Iron Works Pike, Lexington, KY 40578. There is a modest charge for bulk orders.